

Chancellor's Community Forum
Five-Year Plan
October 29, 2008
Francis-Stevens Education Campus
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm
Zac Morford

The notes below reflect our effort to summarize the comments, questions and concerns expressed at each meeting. They are not recorded verbatim and should not be considered direct quotations.

Overview: This small group was mainly made up of teachers and community members. The conversation centered mostly on concerns with student reading skills at all levels and what was being done exactly in terms literacy coaches and reading teachers at a school level. One participant was particularly interested in graduation rates and how they were determined. At the very end, a short discussion came up about the lack of technology mentioned in the plan.

Keywords: reading teachers, literacy coaches, training, training programs, technology, professional development, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), graduation rates, graduation, professional developer, numeracy coaches, DC CAS, Comprehensive Staffing Model, after school activities, extra-curricular activities, adolescent initiatives

Presenter/ Moderator: Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management

Panelists: Zachary Morford, Director of SchoolStat
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

Codes

MR = Michelle Rhee, Chancellor
AS = Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management
ZM = Zac Morford, SchoolStat Director
JN = Jill Nyhus, Director of Technology, Note taker
CM = Community Member

Notes:

ZM: Thanks for coming. This is our first community meeting on the plan. I've been in the District since July 2007. I run SchoolStat for the chancellor and manage her performance management team – looking at metrics at a district level. Tonight we're going to facilitate conversation. The chancellor will come around and it's free game. Jill will capture everything and anything I promise Jill will capture.

CM: We strongly need **reading teachers**. **Literacy coaches** are supposed to be doing that. We had **reading teachers** for each grade level at my last school (Ballou) and scores stayed up. We need **reading teachers** for each grade level. Students have very

poor reading skills. There are a lot of new teachers and they need mentors. There are a lot of teachers from other countries and they need to be coached on how to teach African-American kids. There should be a mentor program. Eastern needs to be closed down completely and be renovated. I have gone through a lot as a teacher. It took a long time for Ballou to get back together. We need **training** programs. We need to bring in community resources for pep talks and we need **training programs** of different types that would help kids get ready for a career path; all career centers should open up – our kids need a career path.

ZM: Good question to ask the chancellor about in regards to the benefits of **literacy coaches** versus **reading teachers**.

CM: I've had so many reading courses. We need reading teachers to get deep with skills. In reading class, you get all kinds of skills. At Ballou, kids who were below reading level had a reading class. It worked, scores went up. Reading teachers work. **Literacy coaches** are good too in order to keep teachers going but it's going to **take reading teachers** to keep increasing students' reading skills..

MR: We've had a lot of conversations with schools about this. Some schools have Reading Specialists. **Literacy coaches** are responsible for **professional development** for teachers. In an ideal situation, we would do both – those pulling kids out in classrooms and then **literacy coaches** work with them. At the school level, it was smarter to put our efforts toward literacy coaches so that they can build capacity within the school. Our view point is that BOTH can be incredibly valuable. As we have more money, we would want to staff that up.

CM: *What's the difference between **literacy coaches** and **reading specialists**?*

MR: **Literacy coaches** train teachers and guide in differentiate learning; **reading specialists** work with taking students. In a good elementary classroom, you see a lot of small groups; at a high school you see less of that but some of the same strategies should be applied. #1 **professional development**. It's about differentiation for the teachers. #2: How do we implement interventions with kids who need it?

CM: *Are there specific **adolescent initiatives**? Are there models we can buy into?*

MR: At the high school level, we don't have nearly enough what need to implement for students to graduate from high school. A few things we are doing:

1. We are utilizing **technology** computer programs like Read 180 for individualized interventions.
2. We are getting leveled-readers that are still of interest for grade appropriate level (like you can't hand a 9th grader a 3rd-grade-level reader).
3. We are training teachers on how to use the full English block (right now it's 45 minute of instruction and then 45 minutes of homework; we need to train teachers how to remediate on past skills and at the same time in the second half

hit new skills that will be on grade-levels – how they be done simultaneously – we need to a better job as a school district.

CM: I was in a reading program at UDC this summer that was very good. We all take classes – but what we should do is to get with the literacy coaches and share what we learned.

MR: That's exactly the kind of thing we should do. Here, in DCPS, we have 30 minutes of collaborative **professional development** everyday in every school.

CM: I do support a strong reading initiative. There used to be a resource called “Community Speakers and Resources.” Our students need a link to our neighborhoods and workplaces – they need to know that there is another world. Students don't seem to have a care of their own education. You have provided for students **after school programs**, etc. but the students don't take advantage of them. *How do we get the students to take advantage?*

MR: If you have examples of “Community Speakers and Resources”, send it our way. Also, see Shereen Williams, our Director of Community Partnerships. To your second point – if you ask what keeps me up at night, it's our high school students and how do we engage them. It's a challenge. We've tried to put more money into extra-curricular activities. Many of our high schools have lots funding for **extra-curricular activities**. We've invested in different kinds of settings. We've created smaller learning environments – to give disengaged students opportunities. We've identified rising 9th graders to provide them with internships. We don't have enough of them but we're planting the seeds. If you have individual questions, I'm happy to email with you.

ZM: There's no easy fix on the attendance issue. It's a two-way street: Kids are voting with their feet and they are going to the streets. It's not entirely the school – it's a combination. But if we in the classroom can engage students and also create other programs too, that's our part. We need to give students a wide-variety of settings. With **Comprehensive Staffing Model**, we're trying to get all kinds of teachers – music, art, etc. In my opinion, it is an epidemic.

CM: There's got to be a better way for students. Kids ask: “Why don't they pay us to take the **DC CAS?**” I had students just bubble.

CM: It's not just your kids – it's happening at Wilson with high-achieving students.

CM: I lied to my students saying it affected their promotion. They are not stakeholders. Students have to be held accountable.

ZM: As a first step, we've created is an Office of Youth Engagement – led by Chad Ferguson. He is also an instructional superintendent, but he doesn't have as many schools as other instructional superintendents to focus on youth engagement issues.

This is significant and how we get them to participate. There is no easy answer. Chad is someone you can talk to.

CM: That tells you something about the **DC CAS**. It all really comes down to the classroom teacher. You're not going to turn it around until you value the classroom teachers and give them what they need. This is hard work – and programs won't do it. I wanted to ask the chancellor about how she is going to pay for her initiatives. In terms of being on the ground, you have to not be at war with classroom teacher and that's what I've seen so far. You have to value people and you can't dismiss people wholesale.

ZM: There are good and well-intentioned teachers – the majority of teachers are very well-intentioned. The chancellor charged Teaching & Learning to teach “bell to bell.” I believe whole-heartedly that we need to develop teachers (so does the chancellor). The closest we come to it is 2.1 in the Performance Plan. There's a woman named Cheryl Krehbiel in **Professional Development** – we are in the process of revamping **professional development**. Part of it is arming each school with **professional developers**. The focus is on **literacy** and **numeracy coaches**. We need **literacy coaches** to be our best teachers so that they can touch 25 teachers who can then each touch 25 kids. We need leaders in each school.

CM: We need to value teachers.

CM: Maybe we can have a **professional developer** in each subject area at each school.

CM: My question is about the role of **graduation rates**. I'm trying to find what the actual graduation rate is for DCPS. *Where are we now and what are we doing as we move forward?*

ZM: We don't get our **graduation rate** data until in November or December – very slow lagging indicator. We are beginning to monitor where our high school students are in terms of being on track for **graduation**. This requires a lot of clean-up of transcripts.

CM: *How do I access the **graduation rates** for past years?*

ZM: We have not historically measured **graduation rates** correctly. This year we are totally revising how we calculate our **graduation rates**. I'm not sure how much we are going to go back historically.

CM: *Because **graduation rates** has become part of **Adequate Yearly Performance (AYP)**, where are we now and where are we going?*

CM: OSSE has a project going on for measuring; they have done a public study. The figure I always hear is 58%.

CM: *How are we going to establish our progression for **AYP**?*

ZM: That is a level of detail that I can't answer. Talk to Erin McGoldrick (Chief of Data & Accountability for DCPS) downstairs – she'll have concrete answers.

CM: *Would the DC-CAP office know?*

ZM: I don't know.

CM: *Is there a way to put transcripts into an electronic version?*

ZM: Proficiency is a set bar. **AYP** by 2014 is 100% of the students are deemed “proficient” - it's an artificial bar – like next year “x”% will be proficient. We go in two-year steps. Two years ago proficiency was roughly 40-42%; this year it was 60-63%. And it's going to keep going up. NCLB is a whole separate conversation.

What are the missing pieces from the plan?

CM: I'm waiting for the day when there is success because of something central office does. *Could there be an executive officer at a school level who puts out the fires and frees school leaders to go into the classrooms?* I would like to see more restructuring. I'm thrilled to see more partnering. Engaging students, parents & communities should be the #1 priority. I would like to see recognition of high-level of teaching that is going on.

ZM: That's part of why we created the TEAM award. There are excellent teachers at every school and the question is how do we publicize this.

CM: We've got pockets of excellence everywhere.

CM: The chancellor says schools are broken. I was an attorney for 7 years, came in as a teacher and I'm not broken! We are not broken and we are having great successes every day. When we, as teachers, hear that everyday, we don't know what to do. We are here to fix a broken system. As a middle school teacher, I can tell within a week where my kids go to elementary school. I can tell based on their level of reading. We have to focus on the ground work. They need good support.

CM: They may need to give reading software to the teachers.

ZM: We are arming each teacher with information about where there kids are. We need to help our elementary school teachers and monitor their students' reading ability on a weekly basis.

CM: I noticed that there is a big push for **technology**. I have 3 computers in the classroom. I don't have 30. A lot of students don't have internet at home.

CM: *Where is the master plan for school **technology**?*
[Session ended, follow-up individual.]